

**RHODE ISLAND SCHOOL FOR THE DEAF**  
**BOARD OF TRUSTEES**  
**One Corliss Park**  
**Providence, Rhode Island 02908**

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**MEETING MINUTES**

**Date:** March 10, 2005

**Time:** 6:00 PM

**Minutes recorded by:** Jake Camara

**Minutes Approved on:** June 9, 2005

**Interpreters:** Jonathan Henry, Rosa Norberg

**Minutes**

**I. Call to Order**

The meeting of the RI School for the Deaf Board of Trustees was called to order by Trustee Zellner at 6:03PM in the RI School for the Deaf Cafeteria.

**II. Roll Call of Board of Trustees**

In Attendance: Bonnie Abols, Carol Dorros, Steve Florio, Tracy Karasinski, Neil Leahey, Travis Zellner

Excused: Maureen McEntee, Phil Wheeler

**III. Acceptance of Previous Meeting Minutes**

**a. February 10, 2005**

- i. Motion** was made by Trustee Karasinski to accept the minutes of February 10, 2005 as submitted. Seconded by Trustee Leahey. Approved unanimously.

**IV. Reports**

**a. Interim Director**

- i. John Plante** highlighted points from his Interim Director's report.
  - 1.** Trustee Florio expressed his concern that when people contact the school they are not assisted as well as they should be.
    - a.** Discussion took place regarding the availability of information at the front desk and the attentiveness to the needs of people calling the school for information.
  - 2.** Trustee Florio asked about the ASL proficiency testing.
    - a.** Mr. Plante informed the Board that he had documentation on all of the attempts made to contact people regarding this matter. He distributed this information to the Board.



**b. Director's Travel Request**

- i. Motion** was made by Trustee Dorros to approve Mr. Plante's travel to the Public School Caucus conference in April. Seconded by Trustee Abols. Approved unanimously.

**VI. Public Comment**

- a.** Diane Bertozzi asked where the school safety policy is in the approval process.
  - i.** Trustee Karasinski responded that a lot of the work that came out of the safety committee went to the Policy Committee last summer and several items relating to the handbooks were approved.
  - ii.** Wayne Hannon responded that one of the last things submitted was an evacuation plan for the school. The reason why nothing has been communicated yet is that the Policy Committee has not yet met to make decisions on these policies. The maps can be posted in the meantime, but the policy cannot be enforced until it is read by the Policy committee and approved by the full Board of Trustees.
- b.** Earnest Okwara expressed concern because his name was mentioned in the January minutes and some of the information was incorrect. The interpreter will read a document prepared by Mr. Okwara.
- c.** Mr. Okwara clarified that he is not requesting to change the minutes from January, but wants his information added to tonight's meeting minutes for the public to view.
  - i.** Trustee Zellner apologized to Mr. Okwara. The motion to send him a letter was made while he was acting as chairperson, but because of his schedule he overlooked sending a letter. In the letter he was going to send it would have stated that the Board wanted to make sure the proper chain of command was followed.
  - ii.** Mr. Okwara said that he did go through the proper chain of command but these attempts were ignored by administrators. He stated that anyone can send a letter to the Board of Trustees without going through a chain of command. But now that this has been posted on the website, his name has been damaged.
  - iii.** People ask questions of the Board of Trustees and everything is always positive. The Board might want to consider the negative things happening in this environment. Damage has been done to his name. There is no reason to change the minutes now.
  - iv.** Trustee Zellner took responsibility for not sending the letter. He would have investigated the issue a little more if he had known he felt his name had been damaged.
  - v.** Mr. Okwara said that the issue is not the letter, but that his name has been slandered in the public meeting minutes.
  - vi.** Trustee Florio asked what Mr. Okwara would like the Board to do.
    - 1.** Mr. Okwara said that he believes his job had been influenced and just wanted the Board to know how he feels.
  - vii.** Trustee Dorros said it is unfortunate that he could not be at the January meeting to clarify things when the letter had been read.

The Board's understanding was that for issues of policy, they should be brought to the Policy Committee. Anyone has a right to send as many letters as they want. It is the obligation of everyone, including teachers, to express concerns in regards to issues at the school. She apologized that he felt slandered because this was obviously not the intent.

- viii. Mr. Okwara said that whether or not he received a letter would not have influenced his feelings. When a motion was made to tell him to go through the proper chain of command, this compounded the problem. If Wayne had sent a letter to the staff members letting them know the proper chain of command, the harm would not have been done. This was not done. It was specifically directed at him picking him out of the crowd.
- ix. Earnest Okwara said that the information he gave this evening should be added to the public meeting minutes to defend his name.
- x. Trustee Karasinski said that she doesn't think there is a process for inserting a letter from the public in the minutes. The minutes can refer to a letter that was given to the Board. This should be checked with legal counsel.
- xi. Trustee Zellner suggested that the Board of Trustees recognize the written and verbal statement provided by Earnest Okwara. Mr. Okwara's concerns were in connection with the January meeting minutes and the references to his name.
- xii. Trustee Karasinski will investigate this issue with John Plante

#### **VII. Agenda Items and Next Meeting Date**

- a. The Policy committee will discuss the ASL Proficiency Policy.
- b. More will be discussed about the Executive Session at the next meeting.

#### **VII. Adjournment**

- i. The meeting was adjourned at 8:46PM.